

Chapter Twenty: International Departures and Transnational Texts in Contemporary Brazilian Literature: the ‘Amores Expressos’ series

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Brazilian literature has always reflected a deep concern with national identity, in a concerted effort to differentiate Brazilians from their former colonial masters, the Portuguese, from challenges to their territory from surrounding countries in South America, and from the cultural imperialism of Europe, and, more recently, the United States. In an article published in New York in 1873, the great Brazilian novelist and journalist Machado de Assis (1839-1908) famously detected a ‘national instinct’ in the literary production of his fellow countrymen, centred on what he called a ‘certain intimate feeling that renders him a man of his time and country, even when he addresses topics that are remote in time or space’, for a writer could ‘be a good Scot without ever mentioning the thistle’ if they possessed ‘a certain inner Scottishness, which was distinct and superior for not being merely superficial’.¹ He argued that writers should not feel impelled to linger on descriptions of local colour, and vocabulary, to the detriment of exercising their intuition and imagination, inspired by wider philosophical and moral questions. This, he felt, would lead to the independence of Brazilian literature.

The ingredients of Brazilianness may have changed since the nineteenth century but the assertion of a unique cultural identity has not, according to recent surveys of

¹ ‘Reflections on Brazilian Literature at the Present Moment: The National Instinct’, trans. by Robert Patrick Newcomb, *Brasil/Brazil* 26.47 (2013), 85-101 (p. 89).

trends in contemporary Brazilian literature,² even as initiatives are developed to increase the visibility of Brazilian literature abroad.³ After a period at the end of the twentieth century in which there was a sustained focus inwards, in the form of neo-realist fiction highlighting social issues affecting mostly urban areas, the best-known example being Paulo Lins's *Cidade de Deus* (1997) [*City of God*] and its hugely successful film adaptation,⁴ there has been a distinct growth in more transnational Brazilian literature.⁵ Writers with experience of living abroad (diplomats, students, writers in residence at foreign institutions, first or second-generation migrants) have incorporated their impressions into their fiction to the apparent avoidance of 'Brazilian' subjects and settings, and produced popular, prize-winning works.⁶

In their introduction to issue 121 of *Granta*, which grandly presents 'The Best of Young Brazilian Novelists', the editors claim that this generation of writers is 'not especially concerned with parsing what derives from within and what comes from outside. Sons and daughters of a nation that is more prosperous and open, they are citizens of the world, as well as Brazilians.'⁷ The notion of a particularly Brazilian way of doing global citizenship, underpinned by a twenty-first-century cosmopolitanism,

² See Beatriz Resende, *Contemporâneos: Expressões da literatura brasileira no século XXI* (Rio de Janeiro: Casa da Palavra, 2008); Schøllhammer, Karl Erik, *Ficção brasileira contemporânea* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2011; 2nd ed.).

³ See Regina Zilberman, 'Desafios da literatura brasileira na primeira década do séc. XXI', *Nonada: Letras em Revista* 13.15 (2010), 183-200; Carmen Villarino Pardo, 'Literatura brasileira atual e desafios do contemporâneo', *Abriu* 6 (2017), 9-14.

⁴ Paulo Lins, *Cidade de Deus* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1997); *City of God*, trans. by Alison Entrekin (London: Bloomsbury, 2006); *Cidade de Deus*, dir. by Fernando Meirelles, 2002. See Tânia Pellegrini, 'No fio da navalha: literatura e violência no Brasil de hoje', *Estudos em Literatura Brasileira Contemporânea* 24 (2004), 15-34.

⁵ See, for example, Leonardo Tonus, 'Alteridades expressas no romance brasileiro contemporâneo', in *Das Luzes Às Soleiras: Perspectivas Críticas na Literatura Brasileira Contemporânea*, ed. by Ricardo Barberena and Vinícius Carneiro (Porto Alegre: Luminara, 2014), pp.107-128; *Transnacionalidades: Arte e Cultura no Brasil Contemporâneo*, ed. by Cimara Valim de Melo (Porto Alegre: Metamorfose, 2017).

⁶ I am thinking of writers like Adriana Lisboa, Paloma Vidal, Bernardo Carvalho, Tatiana Salem Levy and Fernando Bonassi, whose book of fragments of travel narrative, *Passaporte* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2013), is the size and shape of a passport.

⁷ Roberto Feith and Marcelo Ferroni, 'Foreword: The Best of Young Brazilian Novelists', trans. Nick Caistor, *Granta* 121 (2012), 7-11 (p.7). Here, 'young' means under the age of forty.

was manifested in a project initiated in 2007, known as ‘Amores Expressos.’⁸ It sought to showcase the versatility and creativity of Brazilian authors. A collaboration between film producer Rodrigo Teixeira, prestigious publishing house Companhia das Letras and up-and-coming writer João Paulo Cuenca, the project took the form of a series of novels.⁹ The plan was to send seventeen Brazilian writers to destinations around the world, for one month, to write a love story inspired by the setting, which would then be published as a novel and also turned into a film.¹⁰

The writers and their destinations were Amilcar Bettega (Istanbul), Bernardo Carvalho (St Petersburg), João Paulo Cuenca (Tokyo), Daniel Galera (Buenos Aires), Cecília Giannetti (Berlin), André de Leonés (São Paulo), Adriana Lisboa (Paris), Chico Mattoso (Havana), Reinaldo Morães (Mexico City), Lourenço Mutarelli (New York), Antonia Pellegrino (Bombay), Daniel Pellizzari (Dublin), Antonio Prata (Shanghai), Luiz Ruffato (Lisbon), Sérgio Sant’Anna (Prague), Paulo Scott (Sydney) and Joca Reiners Terron (Cairo).¹¹ During their time abroad, the authors were expected to write a blog. At some point a film crew would accompany them for three days, and turn the

⁸ The title is difficult to translate into English. ‘Amores’ [loves] is straightforward, but ‘expressos’, an adjective derived from the past participle of the verb ‘expressar’ [to express, explain, present] has several interpretations, including ‘rapid’, ‘urgent’ and ‘obvious’. In relation to coffee, ‘expresso’ is an Italian import to Brazil, which is ironic, considering that for centuries coffee was used stereotypically as synonymous with the country. All translations from Portuguese are mine, unless otherwise attributed. All references to these novels are given parenthetically within the text.

⁹ The project was announced in daily newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*: Cadão Volpato, ‘Bonde das Letras’, *Folha de São Paulo*, 17 March 2007,

<<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/fsp/ilustrad/fq1703200707.htm>> [consulted 8 August 2017].

¹⁰ In 2003, Teixeira masterminded the volume *Parati Para Mim* (Rio de Janeiro: Agir, 2003), for which Cuenca, Mattoso and Santiago Nazarian wrote a short story about Paraty, in order to commemorate the first year of Brazil’s most important Literary Festival, FLIP. I am aware of only one other comparable literary project involving travel: *The Weekenders: Travels in the Heart of Africa* (London: Ebury, 2001). For this collection, established writers from various genres were commissioned by the *Daily Telegraph* to visit ‘one of the most extraordinary and inaccessible places on the planet’, now South Sudan, to ‘engage with a previously unreachable war’ and produce texts, the royalties going towards aid. Susan Ryan, ‘Introduction’, pp. 1-3 (p. 2).

¹¹ The contributors ranged widely in age and experience: veterans Sant’Anna (b. 1941) and Morães (b. 1950) were the oldest, Pellegrino (b. 1979), a scriptwriter and columnist, the youngest. All had published short stories, some had a few novels under their belts, several had won national prizes. Carvalho, Ruffato and Lisboa already had an international reputation. Cuenca, Galera, Mattoso and Prata were among *Granta*’s ‘Best Young Brazilian Novelists’.

results into a TV series.¹² At the outset Cuenca and Teixeira expressed the intention that in their interpretations of their new environments the writers would ‘make some noise’.¹³

The immediate reaction to the announcement of the project was shock at the fact that it might be partly funded by public money, under the Lei Rouanet, a law passed in 1991 which enables companies to offset income tax by investing in cultural projects, although, in the end, this did not happen. There was also criticism of the choice of writers (some of whom had never published a novel), questioning of the destinations (too glamorous?) and debate about the potential effects that writing on commission may have on the quality of the work produced.¹⁴ Critics were surprised at the choice of the love story theme, calling it old-fashioned, but the organizers promised that they had selected writers who were talented and creative enough to avoid clichés. Whether or not they succeeded is debatable, but what is certain is that this experiment provides us with a set of very different novels that do, nonetheless, illustrate how Brazilians abroad, both authors and their characters, engage with cultures different from their own and repackage them in a literary form for the Brazilian reader.

By the end of 2017, ten years after the project was first announced, ten novels had been published and one adapted for cinema.¹⁵ Companhia das Letras rejected two

¹² The TV series was directed by Tadeu Jungle and Estela Renner and first broadcast in 2011. The blogs were first posted in April 2007 and some can still be found at: <<http://e-viajantes.blogspot.com/2008/11/5-amores-expressos.html>> [accessed 5 September 2018]. The book trailers produced for Companhia das Letras can still be accessed at the publishers’ website.

¹³ See Volpato.

¹⁴ Rosane Correa Lobo has analyzed the media reaction to the announcement in Volpato’s article: firstly an outraged letter published in *Folha de São Paulo* the next day by author Marcelo Mirisola, then, a week later, an article summarizing accumulated criticism from assorted writers and bloggers. ‘Amores Expressos: Narrativas de Não-Pertencimento’, Masters’ thesis presented to PUC Rio de Janeiro (2010), pp. 36-39.

¹⁵ ‘Estive em Lisboa e Lembrei de Você’ [I went to Lisbon and thought of you] directed by José Barahona (2015). There were rumours, as yet unsubstantiated, of a film version of Carvalho’s novel *O Filho da Mãe* [The Mother’s Son/ Son of a Bitch] (2009), to be directed by Karim Aïnouz, with a screenplay by Downton Abbey creator Julian Fellowes, and starring Wagner Moura

authors (Giannetti and de Leonés).¹⁶ Lisboa abandoned the project for ‘structural’ reasons. Pellegrino’s was still due.¹⁷ Mutarelli, Morães and Prata stated publicly that they felt hampered by the restrictions of the commission but might rework their notes at a later, unspecified date.¹⁸

The AE project seemed to tick a lot of boxes in terms of catering to national tastes, as well as potentially international ones: they are at once travel narratives, tourist guides, adventure stories and romances.¹⁹ The ‘authenticity’ of the authors’ experiences, attested to in the blogs and documentaries (which prove that they really went), bolstered by background reading and research (as evidenced in the blogs and acknowledgements in the texts) reassures the reader that their encounter with a foreign city will be genuine.

Although it is an unashamedly commercial venture, the resulting texts provide interesting representations of the ways different cultures interact and how Brazil sees its place on the world literary stage. If read as ten composite interlocking parts of a literary project, they try to assert a cosmopolitan outlook that broadens the horizons of the Brazilian reader, celebrates the apparent global intercultural competence of Brazilian citizens (both authors and their characters), and as Berthold Schoene puts it

¹⁶ De Leonés published *Como Desaparecer Completamente* [How to Disappear Completely] with Rocco in 2010.

¹⁷ In her *Cem Ideias que Deram em Nada* [A Hundred Ideas that Came to Nothing] (Rio de Janeiro: Foz, 2014), two sections or ‘ideas that came to nothing’ refer to a trip to India, one of which ‘52: Ideia para livro de amor’ [Idea for a love story], pitches a book or film combining a love letter and impressions of visiting India, p. 86.

¹⁸ Marco Rodrigo Almeida, ‘Encomenda travou escritores da coleção Amores Expressos’, *Folha de São Paulo*, (27 July 2013), <<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/2013/07/1317373-encomenda-travou-escritores-da-colecao-amores-expressos.shtml>> [accessed 29/3/2017].

¹⁹ To date, Ruffato’s *Estive em Lisboa e Lembrei de Você* (2009) has been translated and published in France, Germany, Argentina and Italy, as well as in Portugal, where a slightly different title reflects a grammatical divergence between the European and Brazilian variants of Portuguese: *Estive em Lisboa e Lembrei-me de ti* (Lisbon: Quetzal, 2010). Translations of Carvalho’s novel were published in France and Argentina in 2010 and 2014 respectively. Of the other ten, Cuenca’s *O Único Final Feliz para uma História de Amor é um Acidente* [*The Only Happy Ending for a Love Story is an Accident*] (2010) is the only one to have been translated into English, by Elizabeth Lowe, (Dartmouth: Tagus Press, 2013), but also Spanish, German, French, Finnish and Romanian, the last perhaps because the female protagonist hails from the city of Constanța.

in his influential work on the cosmopolitan novel, ‘imagin[es] the world instead of the nation.’²⁰ When considered as cosmopolitan novels, they can be seen to counter the potentially flattening effect of globalization, dismantle borders and invite interaction between Brazil and other cultures. This is a lot to ask of a series of novels and not all of them live up to the challenge.

Schoene identifies central traits of the cosmopolitan novel as follows: ‘its representation of worldwide human living and global community,’ ‘opening oneself up to a radical unlearning of all definitive modes of identification’, and the aim ‘to reveal the anachronism of [...] hegemonic distinctions between self and other’.²¹ The Brazilian archetype of the ‘cordial man’, a concept created by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda in 1936, is worth mentioning briefly here.²² Holanda suggests that Brazilians are particularly gifted at establishing smooth social interactions, though his definition of cordiality ‘does not refer to politeness or civility, but rather to an abhorrence of distant – even formal, or ritualistic – relationships.’²³ This is borne out by the behaviour of the Brazilian characters in the novels, who avoid confrontation and seek to establish intimate relationships with local people as soon as possible, though their attitudes towards others are sometimes less than cordial.

The authors of the AE novels negotiate Machado de Assis’s version of Brazilianness in different ways: by overasserting it, or by hiding it. In the novels by Bettega, Galera, Mattoso, Ruffato, Sant’Anna and Terron the narrators or protagonists are Brazilian citizens abroad, representing their nation and channelling the new culture for Brazilian readers. In contrast, Carvalho, Cuenca, Pellizzari and Scott eliminate

²⁰ Berthold Schoene, *The Cosmopolitan Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 12.

²¹ Schoene, pp. 17-18, p. 21, p. 28.

²² Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, *Raízes Do Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2014 [1936]).

²³ Rachel Randall, ‘Cordiality and Intimacy in Contemporary Brazilian Culture’, *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, 24.3 (2018), 295-310 (p. 299).

almost every reference to Brazil except the language of their prose. For example: while Sant'Anna's protagonist Antonio is a thinly-veiled portrait of himself (a Brazilian writer commissioned to portray Prague),²⁴ Scott's Narelle is a truly global citizen, a woman of Maori and British descent who is constantly travelling, for business and pleasure, and interacting with people around the world (including Brazil) via Skype and mobile phone.²⁵

When the backdrop is not so exotic, or more familiar, the distancing effect is achieved in different ways. Male authors write female protagonists (or transgender in Terron's case).²⁶ Carvalho sets the action in the past. Pellizzari employs multiple narrators or parallel plots.²⁷ Scott creates characters with mental health issues or medical conditions. Sant'Anna narrates a surreal, almost psychedelic fantasy. There is a strong feeling of irony in most of the novels that seems to be a reaction by the authors against producing cosmopolitan texts to order. Machado de Assis's injunction to Brazilian novelists not to linger on local colour is taken to extremes in these novels set beyond the country's borders, and yet nods and winks to the readers (jokes about Argentinians, slang, comparisons in which the Brazilian element is superior) ensure that the fellow-country-reader does not feel too far out of their depth.

The voracious, curious novelist's gaze is not that different from that of an eager tourist, always on the lookout for the odd and quirky as well as the outrageous or shocking, in order to convey the extra-ordinary difference of the alternate, temporary world of the holiday or the text. Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan try to explain the success of travel writing as the creation of what they term 'a new *exotic*':

²⁴ *O Livro de Praga: Narrativas de Amor e Arte* [The Book of Prague: Tales of Love and Art] (2011).

²⁵ *Ithaca Road* (2013).

²⁶ *Do Fundo do Poço se vê a Lua* [From the Bottom of the Well you can see the Moon] (2010).

²⁷ *Digam a Satã que o Recado foi Entendido* [You Can Tell Satan we got the Message] (2013).

The travel literature industry [...] has been quick to cash in on Westerners' growing fears of homogenization, promoting its products as thrilling alternatives to the sanitized spectacles of mass tourism; as evidence that the world is still heterogeneous, unfathomable, bewildering; as proof that the spirit of adventure can hold off the threat of exhaustion. In this sense, the travel (literature) business has capitalized on, while contributing to, a new *exotic* [...].²⁸

The AE project is an excellent example of this assertion of global heterogeneity and the presentation of the wow factor of the exotic, to draw in readers/visitors. The writers describe wonders, natural and man-made, the breathtaking and the repulsive, emphasizing differences in customs and behaviour, to the readers' horror and delight. Such literature, when discussing everyday routines and 'normal life' in a foreign setting tends to involve a certain ethnographic dimension. This always runs the risk of becoming reductive, and even exploitative, when an author persists in presenting a culture negatively in relation to their (and their readers') own, or 'purports to [...] report on other peoples and cultures while using them as a backdrop for the author's own personal quest.'²⁹

Paloma Vidal identifies three strategies used to convey the narrators' approach to the host culture in the original AE blogs: introspection, rejection and indifference, none of which seems conducive to a return trip, or a productive long-term relationship.³⁰ She goes on to note that Antonia Pellegrino's blog at times appeared to

²⁸ Holland and Huggan, *Travellers with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), p. 2.

²⁹ Holland and Huggan, p. 12.

³⁰ Vidal, pp. 82, 83.

project a prejudiced view of Indians as ‘dirty, macho, thieves’.³¹ This comment seems to express a cosmopolitan legacy of colonial prejudices, with international elites determining what is civilized and what is savage. Indeed, in the novels, the visiting Brazilian characters’ appreciation and treatment of the locals can be patronizing and reductive.³² They never feel completely comfortable, nor do they contemplate staying, never mind ‘going native’. Even in the novels without Brazilian characters, outsiders and foreigners in the ‘host’ culture are subject to racist, sexist and transphobic aggression, which does not uphold the cosmopolitan ethos of learning from each others’ differences, nor does it promote ‘cordiality’.

Mattoso’s protagonist Renato undergoes a kind of rebirth (as his name suggests) in Havana when his girlfriend leaves him and he starts a new relationship with the city. On arrival he had never felt so foreign, but once he is alone he sees things for the first time and can explore them systematically and scientifically:

Equipped with guidebook and map, I set out to explore Havana methodically, neighbourhood by neighbourhood, block by block. I drew up itineraries. I turned myself into an obsessed tourist, able to time walks, calculate distances, organize the day so as to do as much as possible in the least possible amount of time.³³

Abandonment gives Renato a new sense of purpose and the determination to know the city and somehow tame it by walking its streets. In *Barreira*, Bettega’s characters are scathing towards tourists because of their tendency to consume the world

³¹ Vidal, p. 83.

³² We could read this as an echo of Freyre’s lusotropicalism (see Klobucka, Chapter Three in this volume).

³³ *Nunca vai Embora* [It Never Goes Away] (2011), p. 48.

through a series of clichéd phrases, sites and images. The initial narrator Ibrahim, feels like a stranger in Istanbul, but emphatically not a tourist:

[You] can't help feeling a certain pleasure at blending in with all those people like one more of the thousands of tourists who come to see the show of this "pulsating city", "true bridge between West and East", a city that is "mysterious", "mythical", "magical" and however many adjectives you want to add which effectively say nothing, [...] you are different, there is nobody more foreign than you in this city not because you bring no reference or preconceived idea, but because what you bring with you cannot be verified here or anywhere else. (28)

Bettega's narrators tell stories from multiple perspectives and act out alternative dénouements, losing the reader in a maze of back streets and views of the city. He also explores the limits and possibilities of images both static (such as the descriptions of photographs of Turkish life by Ara Güler, and Fátima's tourist photos of locations which her father revisits during his search for her) and moving, such as Marc's installation of small screens, each showing videos of views of Istanbul taken by tourists and sourced from YouTube, recreating the effect of Google Earth to construct a 'a truly ever-changing mosaic [...], an image of what the city is metaphorically [...], a living thing which never repeats itself' (197).

The ten authors' month-long stay was intended to give them more than a tourist's experience of the cities they visited. Most of those who decided against creating a Brazilian tourist protagonist achieved convincing portrayals of a new *exotic*, immersing the reader in non-Brazilian cultures as the norm, although they needed to

provide assistance with linguistic, historical and culinary specificities. The most disconcerting aspect of arriving in a new place is, according to Ibrahim in Bettega's novel, being greeted and overwhelmed by a foreign language:

the disconcerting spelling that assaults your eyes and instead of awakening dormant reminiscences in your subconscious prepares you for what it won't take you long to realize, you are a complete stranger in this city, the most complete stranger there could be in Istanbul. (24)

Pellizzari's novel opens with an Irish curse³⁴ and Cuenca's with Japanese ideograms,³⁵ plunging the reader into the confusion a foreigner faces on arrival in Japan: 'in structural terms this functions as a mask, symbolising the many different masks which overlay the novel'.³⁶ Carvalho helps the reader unfamiliar with Russian terms or cultural concepts by explaining them in footnotes or asides, as do Terron and Bettega when describing untranslatable Egyptian and Turkish customs. Pellizzari's novel is full of untranslated Gaelic or Irish sayings and slang, emphasizing the reader's 'tourist' status.

Even the languages closest to Brazilian Portuguese become strange, especially when spoken with the 'wrong' accent. Anita started her visit to Buenos Aires believing that she could get by 'speaking Portuguese and hearing Spanish' (31) but soon discovers otherwise.³⁷ At the end of the novel, much to her humiliation, Argentinians

³⁴ The Gaelic reads '*Go n-ithé an cat thú is go n-ithé an diabhal an cat*' [May the cat eat you and the devil eat the cat] (5).

³⁵ The Japanese characters are a literal translation of the Portuguese title according to Marcel Vejmelka, 'O Japão na literatura brasileira atual', *Estudos em Literatura Brasileira Contemporânea* 43 (2014), 213-234 (p. 224).

³⁶ Vejmelka, p. 224.

³⁷ *Cordilheira* [Cordillera/Mountain Range] (2008), p. 31.

still comment on her poor pronunciation. Ruffato's Serginho discovers, to his surprise, that the people he encounters in Lisbon speak a different Portuguese to the variant he grew up with in Minas Gerais. Not only do they not understand his accent, they laugh at it with undisguised vestigial colonial superiority. Working illegally as a waiter, he makes use of his schoolboy English, pronounced the Brazilian way:

Rei ser, Rei mádam, Ria chípe fude, gude fude, uaine, fiche, mite, têm-quíu (obrigado, dona Gilda, minha professora no curso noturno [...], onde a gente repetia as lições achando que nunca iam servir pra nada [...]). (60)

[Hey sir, hey madam, Here cheap food, good food, wine, fish, meat, thank you (thank you Miss Gilda, my teacher at night school, where we repeated our lessons thinking they'd never be of any use).]³⁸

Interestingly, and in line with the underlying proposition behind the whole series that Brazilians are not provincial and inward-looking but experienced and capable global citizens, the *lingua franca* in most of the novels (if not the official language of the city involved) seems to be the last resort of the tourist: badly and loudly-pronounced English (Sant'Anna, Pellizzari, Mattoso, Barreira, Terron, Cuenca). Terron's William speaks 'Fisk' English in Cairo.³⁹ It is the language of communication between the lovers (Japanese and Romanian) in Cuenca's novel and Renato, who speaks perfect Spanish, is frustrated when a Havana taxi driver insists on addressing him in English.

³⁸ By the end of the novel, Serginho has absorbed European Portuguese terminology into his daily vocabulary ('autocarros [...] elétricos, metro e comboio' rather than 'ônibus', 'bondes', 'metrô' and 'trem' [buses, trams, the underground and trains]), p. 82.

³⁹ Fisk is an American language-learning methodology specifically targeted at Brazilians, set up by Richard S. Fisk in 1958.

In the tourist hotspots visited by many different nationalities, the guides, hotel employees, waiters and local shopkeepers have to be able to converse in several languages if they want a continuous flow of customers. In the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul, tourists are subjected to a ‘a barrage of hellos, good mornings, bonjours, buenos díases and persistent invitations to come in, sit down, have a cup of tea’ (61), and those who deal continually with international visitors end up speaking

a little bit of everything, not everything, just a bit [...], and it’s that bit of each [...] which means that all the languages blend together inside you in a kind of personal Esperanto, a language with only one speaker, but which enables you to communicate with others. (64)

Even though the tone of all ten novels is often heavily ironic, the objectification and sexualization of most female characters, including, rather worryingly, pubescent girls, echoes classic patriarchal and imperialist travel writing where the male protagonists are ‘drawn to surfaces—more particularly, to bodies—onto which they project their fears and fantasies of the ethnicized cultural “other”’.⁴⁰ The narrators’ gaze consistently objectifies women, whether they are wearing *burkas* or bikinis. Any independent female character who travels alone is a target for sexual harassment, aggression or abduction, or symbolically punished with rape (Terron, Galera, Cuenca). Female foreigners, like Romanian Iulana in Tokyo (Cuenca) or Slovakian Stefanija in Dublin (Pellizzari), are physically and culturally different from the locals, which adds to their exotic allure. There are certainly echoes here of Gilberto Freyre’s doctrine of

⁴⁰ Holland and Huggan, p.20; see also Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

Lusotropicalism, which, to use Anna M. Klobucka's words in this volume, celebrates 'the male [Brazilian] subject of the colonial conquest and settlement, whose affective engagement with the welcoming woman/land of the tropics defines and distinguishes the Lusophone imperial and postimperial experience.'⁴¹

It is disappointing that twenty-first century Brazilian authors are still formulating intercultural encounters between men and women in this way, no matter how ironic and performative. Women writers are noticeably absent from the collection, despite the fact that three were part of the original project. There are two female protagonists (Galera, Scott), and one trans woman (Terron), but like the secondary characters they are distorted portrayals.⁴² Male consumption and desire are the driving forces behind much of the action in these novels, whether quests, missions, practical struggles to survive on a daily basis, or a more metaphysical search for knowledge of self and other. Concurrently, female characters are often conflated with food and drink, although more romantic encounters take place in restaurants than in bedrooms.⁴³

From the bars of Havana to the pubs of Dublin, from the El Horreyya Bar in Cairo to cybercafés in Prague, from a (bad) imitation Dunkin' Donuts near Shinjuku Station in Tokyo to the McDonald's on Tsverskaya Street in Moscow, all these settings function as backdrops to some of the most interesting scenes of multicultural bricolage in the novels. The staff at the restaurant where Serginho (a proud mixture of 'Coropo Indian, Portuguese and slave' [28]) works replicates the colonial hierarchy: a white Portuguese manager bosses around the Ukrainian and Brazilian waiters, an elderly,

⁴¹ Anna, M Klobucka, 'Translational Travails of Lusotropicalism', in *Transnational Portuguese Studies*, ed. by Hilary Owen and Claire Williams (Liverpool: LUP, 2020).

⁴² See Leonardo Tonus, 'Alteridades expressas no romance brasileiro contemporâneo', in *Das Luzes às Soleiras: Perspectivas Críticas na Literatura Brasileira Contemporânea*, ed. by Ricardo Barberena and Vinícius Carneiro (Porto Alegre: Luminara, 2014), pp. 107-128.

⁴³ Pellizzari's Marcus, in Dublin, describes Chinese immigrant schoolgirls in uniform as 'a paradox as delicious as Welsh lamb with *hoisin* sauce' (30).

white, female cook and a Guinean dogsbody (58). Pellizzari's novel begins in the 'Bleu Note', where Marcus reflects on the irony of 'a Frenchified name for an Irish pub where they play American music and the clientele is Slav' (10).⁴⁴ In Istanbul Robert is able to purchase a cappuccino that tastes exactly the same as the coffee from his local café back in Paris (129).

Love, the theme that appeared in the original brief to all the authors, takes many different forms in the AE novels, which feature heterosexual and homosexual romances, but also parent-child and sibling relationships, as well as intense friendship, and fleeting, erotic encounters, unrequited and imaginary love, nostalgia, jealousy and sexual fantasy. However, despite the variety of formulations, there is not one conventional happy ending among them, and many storylines are left without resolution.

These novels paint a world characterized by disenchantment and frustration. Cities are chaotic and impenetrable. Quests are fruitless. The object of desire escapes and the attempt to 'capture' the experience of being in a place is thwarted.⁴⁵ Bettiga puts this best when his characters discuss the human need for logical sequences of events, answers, solutions, closure: 'trying to understand, searching for meaning, ends up distancing you from what really matters, what could finally give the thing meaning. Meaning doesn't exist until we reach it' (235). His character, Robert, who writes tour guides, sees his job as trying to help people to 'read the unknown' (137) and find 'a solid base for them to stand on' (101), but the certainty this implies evaporates progressively as the narrative proceeds. The chaos, alienation and fragmenting of

⁴⁴ The action also passes through an American-style diner with orgasmic milkshakes, traditional Irish pubs on the search for the secret pint, and a picnic involving Ribena (whose taste of 'defeated blackcurrant [...] is the most appalling thing in the universe of non-alcoholic drinks'), Lucozade ('radioactive urine with sugar') and a "'wild" Jamaican chicken wrap', pp. 13, 48, 54, 55.

⁴⁵ According to John Frow, disappointment is an integral and inevitable part of the tourist experience, 'Tourism and the Semiotics of Nostalgia', *October* 57 (1991), 123-151 (p. 125).

identity in the AE novels are signs, according to Rosana Correa Lobo, of ‘panic generated by new kinds of migration’ and they reveal the ‘fractures caused by globalization’.⁴⁶

The four novels whose authors eschewed obvious references to Brazilianness fit Schoene’s definition of cosmopolitanism much better than the other six, because they embrace the host culture as the norm and make few concessions to readers’ ignorance of local customs. On the other hand, the reader who accompanies all ten writers to their destination is left with the feeling that the novels in which Brazilians are tourists are still infused with Machado’s ‘certain national instinct’, asserted through comparisons in which abroad is always a poor version of home. These characters: Anita, Renato, Ibrahim, Serginho, Antônio and William and Wilson end up by rejecting the host culture, or being rejected by it; forced to admit that cultural integration is not possible. They have to leave, or die. They are incapable of what Schoene calls the ‘radical unlearning of all definitive modes of identification’ in order to ‘reveal the anachronism of [...] hegemonic distinctions between self and other’⁴⁷ because they are too set in their ways, too Brazilian to change, too ‘self’ to really see or know the ‘other’, particularly the foreign female other.

If we take these ten novels as representative of contemporary Brazilian literature, we might also conclude that cosmopolitanism is something quintessentially Brazilian. From Holanda’s concept of the cordial man to Freyre’s lusotropicalism, cultural mixing lies at the heart of the nation’s identity. But, in their essentially male, often colonially prejudiced gazes the novelists and characters fail (to a large extent) to address the perspective of the Other. Rather than challenging stereotypes of national

⁴⁶ Lobo, p. 35.

⁴⁷ Schoene, p. 28.

literature, they replicate them, often in very entertaining, but sometimes in uncomfortable ways. Machado de Assis's hopes for the 'independence' of Brazilian literature are not fully realized in the AE novels. When it comes to transnational projects, Machado's exhortations continue to define, haunt and confront today's writers, and from the evidence of these ten texts only a few are able to live up to the challenge.